Sin and Forgiveness in Christianity and Islam

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Praise be to Allah, the Lord of Mankind and Jinns and all that exists, and peace be upon the Master of the Messengers, his family and companions.

The followers of Christianity have been making tremendous efforts to spread their dubious beliefs all over the world, especially the Islamic world. They have got various means that help them propagate their deceptive falsehoods, such as offering medical and educational services, humanitarian aid to those suffering from disasters and catastrophes, etc. Such efforts are usually accompanied by religious ceremonies, Christian propaganda, priestly conducts and numerous theological words and slogans. Besides, some practices of a strange nature are performed in such a manner as to give the impression that something reasonable and serious is being presented to the layman who is supposed to believe that Christianity is based upon great fundamentals and practices which aim at saving mankind.

Christians claim that their belief is constructed upon pillars of tolerence, love, mercy, sympathy and self-denial for the sake of others; and their belief and all efforts at the end aim for the happiness and salvation of human beings from sins.

and getting them into the Kingdom of God, claiming that Christianity is the only way leading to paradise. Furthermore they also insist that their beliefs and efforts will eventually and inevitably lead mankind to eternal happiness through salvation which will free man from sins and take him into the Divine Kingdom of God where Christians only are admitted. However, the truth is far away from what they claim. Two of the amazingly strange things they believe in are (1) the idea of the so-called "original sin and forgiveness", the sin that has been inherited by all mankind from Adam (peace be upon him), and (2) forgiveness of this sin through crucifixion. They also believe that all other religions are false and groundless since none of these grants man the privilege of salvation through the belief in the idea of crucifixion; thus non Christians are not qualified to enter paradise.

What is then the origin of sins according to Christians? And what is the gravest sin for them?

How can sins be forgiven? What are the negative results that emanate from their misleading concepts of sin and forgiveness? Is Christianity the only way to salvation?

What is Islam's notion of the origin of sins?
And what is the gravest sin according to Islam?
What are the various ways that lead to forgiveness?

What are the positive results that emanate from Islam's concept of sins and the various means adopted to eradicate them?

To answer these questions and many others, the writer will tackle the fundamental subject of sin and forgiveness from an analytical perspective. This will be carried out by comparing Christianity (a divine religion that has undergone a process of mixed distortion, alteration and forgery during which many pagan ideas were grafted to it) to Islam, the true religion which Allah has promised to safeguard from any distortion or taint. This comparison will magnify the wide gap between the falsehood inherent in Christianity and the truthfulness of Islam.

The present research will deal with the following points:

I) <u>Sin and Forgiveness in Christianity</u>:

1) The Origin of Sins in Christianity
2) The Major Means of Forgiveness in Christianity which are:
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    b) Monasticism
    c) Baptism
    d) Confession
    e) Eucharist and Transubstantiation

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I) <u>Sin and Forgiveness in Christianity</u>:

1) <u>The Origin of Sins in Christianity</u>:

The story of human sin, according to the Old Testament, begins with Adam (peace be upon him) who lived with Eve in Eden, tending the Garden of God. They were permitted to eat from all trees in the garden except from the Tree of Good and Evil. But a serpent persuaded Eve to eat fruit from that forbidden tree. Eve gave some to Adam, who also

ate the fruit. As a result, they became mortal and God expelled them from Eden. Christian and Jews claim that Adam was seduced by both Eve and the serpent who persuaded him that the forbidden tree was the Tree of Knowledge, and if he ate its fruit, he would be given transcendental knowledge. Christians claim that God, believing Adam would be His rival after acquiring knowledge of the invisible world, became wrathful and uttered imprecations against Adam who was sent down to Earth.

Christians believe that Adam's sin is the mother of all sins. It had remained closely connected to his descendants for ages until the incident of crucifixion occurred. They also believe that evil first existed and then spread all over the world because of Adam's misconduct. In addition, they attribute all sorts of human conflicts and wars to this sin.

The story of crucifixion has always been a source of controversy among Christian leaders who sometimes charge each other with infidelity and atheism.

The most influential of all Christian Apostles was Paul who basically established the doctrines of Christianity known today, especially those related to

the original sin, the sins that followed and the way to have them forgiven.

2) <u>The Major Means of Forgiveness in Christianity</u>:

a) Forgiveness through the Belief in the Idea of Crucifixion:

Belief in crucifixion is central to Christianity. According to Paul, crucifixion is the corner stone for all Christian Beliefs, and those who deny it are not considered Christians and do not deserve God's blessings. They cannot enter the Kingdom of God or transcend to glory. They will be destined to eternal torture in Hell for being disobedient to Jesus Christ.

What is the content of this idea? Where did it come from?

The content of this idea is found in some of Paul's epistles to the Romans, Corinthians and Hebrews. He claimed that Christ was not betrayed and crucified by his enemies (the Romans and the Jews) because of the threat he posed to their beliefs and secular powers, but he willingly chose to be humiliated and crucified as a kind of atonement for people's sins, liberating them from the original sin committed by their father, Adam, who ate from the forbidden tree.

In his epistle to the Romans, Paul wrote wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ hath abounded unto many."

Here Paul claims that those who do not believe in the idea of crucifixion are not worthy of God's mercy or His forgiveness. They will not go to Paradise and will not be granted eternal life. Instead, their eternal abode will be Hell because they denied the idea of purgation.

In the light of Paul's interpretation of Adam's sin and the way sins are forgiven, all people including prophets and messengers are cursed by God: therefore, their inevitable fate is eternal torture in Hell. Moreover, all those who deny the idea of crucifixion and salvation are contaminated with the original sin and expelled from God's mercy.

Priests were greatly influenced by Paul's ideas regarding the story of salvation. One of them, Hanna Maqar Al Isawi, wrote a letter in the sixth century Hegira addressing Abu Ubaidullah Al-Khazraji, an Andaulsi scholar inviting him to believe in Christianity and the idea of crucifixion to

save himself from the inherited sin. The letter appeared in Abu Ubaidh's book, Between Islam & Christianity. It says "God's peace and mercy be upon you. I praise God who rightly guided us and supported us with his son. He extended his mercy by crucifixion of Jesus Christ who redeemed us with his sacred blood. He saved us the torture of Hell and carried for us Adam's sin. He shed his own blood for the happiness of all mankind who were cleared of this sin except those who do not believe in him. If you want to be granted God's mercy and reside in Paradise, believe in God and say: Jesus Christ is God's son who is God Himself and the Holy Ghost, three deities in one."

Where did these satanic ideas come from? How did they seep through into Christianity?

The celebrated Western theologist, Rodolf Boltman said in his book Jesus, "Paul took his ideas from the Jews of Minor Asia who adopted Christianity. They had been greatly influenced by Greek philosophy and the myth of the Great Mother, which was widespread in Greece at that time. And it seems that they mixed the doctrines of Christianity with their old religion which was not totally abandoned."

The religion of the Great Mother derives from a myth about the goddess, Sabella, who was

engaged to a man called Attas. She adored him, but he suddenly died. She mourned over him. Nature, including trees, rivers and beasts, shared grief with her and sadness crept over the whole universe.

Suddenly, as the myth goes, Attas was resurrected from death. He was transformed from an ordinary human being with limited powers to lofty god. Sabella was beside herself with joy. And nature again shared happiness with her. The sun rose, the rivers overflow, and the land became green with vegetation. People came out to celebrate the occasion. It became customary to celebrate this event every spring to glorify Attas who conquered death and gave life to the dead land. On that day, they used to sacrifice offerings for the god who conquered death. Year after year, a class of monks appeared, urging the people to believe in this myth and to sacrifice offerings for Attas in order to liberate themselves from their sins and admit them to the Kingdom of God.

No wonder then that Paul took the idea of crucifixion and redemption from the Jews of Asia Minor since he had been originally a Jew himself. During his early life he began to prosecute Jews who were converted to Christianity because their new beliefs and behavior offended him. But one day, while traveling to Damascus, he supposedly encountered the risen Christ. This experience

impressed Paul so greatly that he soon became a Christian.

Paul did not hesitate to borrow myths and folktales and put them in the Christian Book. His justification was that he wanted to encourage non-Christian pagans to incline to Christianity. Ahmed Shalabi, an Arab Scholar, commented on this incident in his book Christianity saying, "The universality of Christianity, introduced by Paul, was the turning point in the history of this religion. By opening the door wide to everybody Paul was obliged to adapt various doctrines to bridge the gap between the religion of the Jews and pagan beliefs that were widespread in Europe at that time. So he introduced the idea of the Trinity and salvation to cope with the beliefs of the nations that were being converted to Christianity."

In many places in his epistles, Paul affirmed that the doctrines he introduced to Christianity were not dictated to him by Christ, but they were his own. This is stated in his epistle to the Galatians where he wrote, "But I certify you brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."

In this way, Paul's efforts to find a way to eradicate Adam's sin produced a religion

fundamentally different from the religion preached by Jesus (peace be upon him). This distorted religion created by Paul is the same religion which is preached everywhere today under the name of Christianity. And this is what the famous Western Theologist, O. T. Davis, illustrated in his book Preachings on the Mountain where he wrote, "True Christianity did not exist until Paul met with the second divinity within the Trinity and unified with Him. He then began to write his epistles to the different nations preaching Christianity as he received it from the Redeemer. So Paul is considered the real founder of the Christianity we see today. Had Paul not appeared, Christianity would have never been a universal religion, and it would have never been largely accepted by millions of people."

Therefore, the idea of crucifixion introduced by Paul, who made it an obligation for true believers, is an alien concept that had not existed in Christianity before Paul developed it. It is not related whatsoever to the true teachings of Jesus the Son of Mary. Thus, the entire idea is totally rejected.

Moreover, Paul did not refer to the sources where he got the news about Jesus. Instead, he admitted that Jesus's teachings were revealed to him in his dreams. This nullifies his claims since the

direct communication with his chief source was lost. And his tales are only a collection of myths and visions lacking documented evidence.

b) Forgiveness through Monasticism:

Monasticism in Christianity derives from a belief that Adam's sin is closely related to physical desire. This idea was inherited by the Christians from the Greek Philosophers, especially Plato who wrote about the dichotomy of soul and body. He sees the body as the prison of the soul which strives all the time to reach its supreme origin, for it had been part of God and then it was separated from Him to incarnate in all living creatures. Thus, it is in constant struggle with the body which hinders soul's ascending to its origin to unify with Him. The author of Religions and Creeds, reviewing Plato's views on God and creation, said, "The universe has its own Eternal Creator. The real nature of any individual thing depends on the form in which it participates. The forms differ greatly from the ordinary things that we can see around us. Ordinary things change, but their forms do not. Forms exist neither in place nor in time. They can be known by the intellect, not by the senses. Plato believed that though the body dies and disintegrates, the soul continues to live forever. After the death of the body, the soul migrates to what Plato called the realm of the pure forms. There it exists without a

body, contemplating the form. The soul always retains a dim recollection of the realm of forms and yearns for it. In order to set the soul free, Plato saw that the body must be fought and punished by making it weak and tired through worship, hunger and austerity. The body will eventually disintegrate and collapse and the soul will migrate to its pure form."

Christian leaders adopted these ideas from Plato and developed them under the name of 'monasticism'. Of all the leaders, the most important figures regarding this concept are Paul, Augustine and the Nestorians.

We have seen in an earlier context how Paul connected the belief in the idea of crucifixion with forgiveness of the original sin. He also claimed that Jesus willingly allowed himself to be humiliated and crucified. Thus, Pauline doctrine suggests that the body deserves to be tortured until it grows pure. In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul worte, "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind: and were by nature the children of wrath.

But God, who is rich in mercy, hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

Christians believe that Adam responded to his physical desires and bestial lusts and so he disobeyed God by eating from the forbidden tree. Body, then, is the origin of all sins, and it cannot be purified unless it is tortured and humiliated. According to Christians, the soul is the victim of the body and its eternal torture is caused by the body's constant offences. To help the soul migrate freely to its Creator, the body must be humiliated.

In the course of time, a class of monks and nuns appeared. To belong to this class, a new member had to pass a number of phases during which he had to expose his body to humiliation and torture. Those who showed fortitude would be admitted as members of what Christians call, the Holy Saints. One way of fighting the body was to refrain from getting married; in one of his epistles, Saint Paul wrote, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord. But he hath married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife."

Influenced by this passage, free masons in the twelfth century went so far as to deny members of

their creed the right to get married. An already married person would have to divorce his/her partner if he/she wanted to join them.

Augustine in the fifth century asserted Paul's principle of staying a bachelor and preached that marriage, an inclination of spiritual weakness and of fierce struggle to satisfy physical desires, would have to be avoided. Monks and nuns were strictly forbidden to get married in order to be good examples. Augustine also claimed that depriving the body of its sensuous pleasures such as good food, smooth clothes, soft beds or having a wife was the battle that every true Christian should fight. This would qualify him to enter the Kingdom of God after being forgiven.

The author of The History of Western Philosophy explained Augustine's view on this matter. He wrote "Earthly life existed for people to live in toil and misery and so they should not occupy themselves with such earthly things as politics, sociology, astrology, etc., since the search for these things will distract the believers and waste their energy. I therefore invite true believers to renounce pleasures in worldly things and become ascetics. Marriage is not becoming for those who want to enter the Kingdom of God."

According to these ideas, we find that Christianity, theoretically, regards virginity, as the ideal state for both men and women. This conceptualization has gradually led to the adoption of mysticism by the Catholic clergy.

The concept of forgiveness through monasticism is well summed-up in the practices and ideas of the Nestorians. In their doctrines we find the following:

> "If man devoted his life to worship and abandoned physical desires, such as eating meat and satisfying his bestial lusts, his essence will be pure and will reach the Kingdom of God and can see God overtly. The invisible world will be revealed to him."

In the eleventh century, Pope Gregory VII issued a decree strictly forbidding all priests and nuns from getting married, since sexual intercourse, he claimed, could eradicate their purity and chastity.

But this decree led to negative consequences. Adultery and homosexuality spread. As a result, the reputation of clergymen, monks and nuns became stained among their followers and the public.

c) Forgiveness through Baptism:

To gain salvation from the original sin committed by Adam, Christians stipulate the practice of baptism. A new born baby or someone newly converted to Christianity must be baptized by being washed with water by a priest.

Christians believe that a baby is born tainted with Adam's sin, and thus it has to be washed by the priests. They say that they are following the example of John, called the Baptist, who used to baptize the believers in the holy river of Jordan. He also baptized Jesus. The authors of the Christian Bible claim that God, addressing Jesus after being baptized, said: Thou art my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased."

The different sects of Christianity have always argued about the power of baptism. Some of them claimed that baptism clears man of all sins including the original sin while others claim that it remits the original sin only; as for the other sins, they can be forgiven through priests.

The different sects have also failed to agree on when, where and how baptism should be performed. However, they all agreed that baptism is only valid when it is performed by priests or Christian leaders. In his book <u>Comparing Religions:</u>

Christianity, Ahmed Shalabi wrote about the topic of baptism saying: "Christians failed to agree on the time when baptism should be performed. Some of them insisted that childhood is the best time for this ritual; others believed it could be carried out during any time of man's life. Others, yet, claimed it could be performed on the death bed since baptism is said to eradicate all sins and this is the time after which no sins would be committed."

According to Christian doctrine, baptism is a symbolic washing with water as a religious practice. It indicates or transmits purification, the washing away of sins, and the start of a renewed life. This is administered by pouring or sprinkling water on the forehead of the person being baptized. Some Eastern Orthodox and Western Protestant Churches practice immersion (submerging a person into water). In a typical Christian baptism ceremony, the person being baptized makes a statement of faith in Jesus. Sponsors, called godparents, may make the statement on behalf of infants. In most cases, a priest or minister then pronounces the person's name and administers the water, saying, "I baptize you in the Name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Baptism should follow a voluntary, public statement of faith in Jesus as savior.

d) Forgiveness through Confession before Priests:

During the early stages of Christianity, the Pope in Rome claimed that Jesus had granted him the power to forgive sins if the sinful person confessed them before him, except for the original sin which could only be forgiven by believing in crucifixion, resurrection and baptism. The Pope also claimed that he was the successor of Peter who set up the Roman Church according to Jesus' instructions and directives and whom Jesus entrusted and authorized to pass judgment on all religious matters, including what was believed to be licit or illicit. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus addressed Peter, saying, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

And I will give unto thee the Keys of the Kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

When the Pope appointed himself as the head of the Roman church, he claimed that he was sinless and infallible. He then gained a reputation among all Christians that he was acting on behalf of Jesus, granting blessings or curses. Not only this, but he gave himself full authority to forgive all sins if they

were confessed in his presence. He said he was acting in accordance with a statement in John's Gospel, saying, "Whose so ever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose so ever sins ye retain, they are retained."

Furthermore, clerical synods, especially the one held in Rome in 1215 Gregorian, acknowledged the Pope's authorities concerning forgiveness of sins, and depriving those who opposed him from entering Paradise.

The members of the synod believed that if a person had the authority to forgive, he would have the authority to deny forgiveness. Subsequently many Popes used the right to deny forgiveness against those kings and nobles who competed politically with them to impose their authority on people.

When people lined up before the Pope's door asking for forgiveness, his assistants imposed fees on those who wanted to confess their sins in the Pope's presence. Things degenerated even further when forgiveness was conditioned on paying a certain amount of money. When the need for money increased during the Crusades, the Pope and his assistants began to sell indulgences.

And whenever the need for money arose to build churches, monasteries or schools, the Pope gave his orders to get indulgences printed and distributed. He assured the purchasers that their eternal abode would be Paradise.

In this way, tremendous fortunes (including money, jewelry, pieces of land and arms) were heaped on the Pope and his assistants. When the idea of selling indulgences reached remote parts of Christian's world, people found it difficult to travel to Rome to confess their sins before the Pope. The Pope seized the opportunity and authorized the local cardinals and bishops to act on behalf of him. This tradition is still applied nowadays.

The local cardinals and bishops took advantage of the authority given to them by the Pope and started blackmailing ordinary people. They bought themselves palaces, estates and pieces of land. As a result, two classes of people emerged in the Middle Ages: the upper class which consisted of feudal lords (nobles and clergymen), and the lower class which consisted of hirelings, workmen and serfs.

3)

e) Forgiveness through Eucharist and Transubstantiation:

The Popes of the Roman Church introduced another way of forgiving sins: through Eucharist and transubstantiation. The root of this story is found in Paul's epistles and John's Gospel. It is said that Jesus shared his last supper before crucifixion with his disciples. The supper consisted of bread and wine. The bread stood for Jesus' body, and wine for his blood. In his epistle to the Corinthians, Paul said, " For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:
And when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do chew the Lord's death till he come."

In John's Gospel, Jesus is claimed to have said, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of the man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whose

eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life: and I will raise him up at the last day."

As for transubstantiation, according to Christians, it is represented by some rituals performed on Easter by those who seek pardon from God. Easter is believed to correspond to the day of the Holy Communion. Therefore, if the scene of last supper is performed by a Christian, eating bread and drinking wine, he is believed to have eaten Christ's flesh and drunk his blood. In this way, his sins will be remitted, and he will be admitted to the Kingdom of God.

How did it occur to Christians that eating bread and drinking wine could symbolize such a strange idea as eating their worshipped God's flesh and drinking His blood? How dare they drink wine since it is strictly forbidden in the Old Testament in which they believe as part of their faith? Furthermore, there is no documented evidence that Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) advised them to do so.

In concluding this chapter we can say that the Christian concept of sin and its means of forgiveness are irrational, illogical, perverted, damaging to man's physical, mental, social and spiritual health and well being.

II) <u>Sin and Forgiveness in Islam</u>:

1. The Lexicographic Interpretation of Sin and Forgiveness:

Sin can be defined in Islam as follows:

- Breaking of the law of God on purpose or the state or condition resulting from this act.
- Wrong doing of any kind; immoral act.
- A violation of any Islamic rule or standard, as of taste or propriety.

Forgiveness can be defined in Islam as follows:

- To give up the wish to punish or get even with an enemy or offender.
- Not have hard feelings at or towards others.
- To give up all claims for damage inflicted on you by others.

According to Islam, to err or commit a sin is human, to forgive is divine.

2. The Origin of Sins in Islam:

Islamic law urged man to be on his guard against sinning, and it sets forth a number of restraints, indications, precautions, and impediment that would prevent people from falling into those sins threatening the safety of the whole society.

Sins are numerous and manifold. The most dangerous type of which comprises those grave or deadly sins which are not revealed (hidden in the heart) such as idolatry, atheism, heresy, hypocrisy, envy, malice, vanity, arrogance, conceit, and cheating.

Sins can be related to negligence of one's obligations towards Allah. And since such sins are between man and Allah, they are more hopefully expected to be forgiven than others. Sins can also be related to one's transgressing on other people's rights. Here, punishment or absolutions are induced during a sinful person's life. Sins are divided into grave sins and venial sins. Grave sins are concerned, with transgresses on the rights of Allah, individuals and society.

The number of grave sins is indefinite; however, it can be confined to those sins whose perpetrators are promised Hell. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, ***"If anyone contends with the Messenger even after guidance has been plainly conveyed to him, or follows a path other than that becoming to men to faith, We shall leave him in the path he has chosen, and land him in Hell, - What an evil refuge!" He also says, "The punishment of those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger, and strive with might and main for mischief through the land is: execution,***

or crucifixion, or the cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides, or exile from the land: that is their disgrace in this world , and a heavy, punishment is theirs in the Hereafter." **God the Almighty says,** ***"If a man kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell, to abide, therein (forever): and the wrath and the curse of Allah are upon him, and a dreadful chastisement is prepared for him."***

If a believer avoids these deadly sins, he was supposed to be forgiven the venial ones. This is emphasized in the Holy Qur'an where Allah says ***"If ye (but) eschew the most heinous of thing which ye are forbidden to do, we shall remit your evil deeds and admit you to a Gate of great honor."*** However, venial sins can turn into grave ones if they are scornfully underestimated and constantly committed. Abdullah bin Mas'ud related to us one narration saying, "A believer sees his sins as if he were sitting under a mountain which, he is afraid, may fall on him; whereas a wicked evil-doer considers his sins as flies passing over his nose and he just drives them away like this." (Abu Shihab, the sub-narrator, moved his hand over his nose in illustration).

Despite the restraints and impediments set by the Islamic law, man is constantly exposed to temptations that make him err, driven by his

ignorance, desires, or human weakness. Thus, falling into sin is something expected from all human beings. This is mentioned in many of the Noble Sayings of the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him).

Islam urges people to keep away from temptations that lead to sins. When someone errs, he is encouraged to repent and ask Allah's forgiveness and to constantly do good. He is asked not to experience despair of Allah's mercy which is always there. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, ***"O ye who believe! Turn to Allah with sincere repentance."****;* Allah loves those who turn to Him constantly and He loves those who keep themselves pure and clean. He says, ***"O my servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah: for Allah forgives all sins: for He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."; and "He that doeth good shall have ten times as much to his credit: He that does evil shall only be recompensed according to his evil: No wrong shall be done unto them. "***

Abu Said AI-Khudri narrated: Allah's Messenger said. "If a person embraces Islam sincerely, then Allah shall forgive all his past sins, and after that starts the settlement of accounts, the reward of his good deeds will be ten times to seven

hundred times for each good deed and an evil deed will be recorded as it is unless Allah forgives it."

Abu Huraira also narrated: Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) said, "Allah says, If My slave intends to do a bad deed then (O angels) do not write it unless he does it; if he refrains from doing it for My sake, then write it as a good deed (in his account). (On the other hand) if he intends to do a good deed, but does not do it then write a good deed (in his account), and if he does it, then write it for him (in his account) as ten good deeds up to seven-hundred times."

Besides, Islam does not take into account those bad deeds which are done foolishly and immediately followed by sincere repentance.

Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, ***"Allah accepts the repentance of those who do evil in ignorance and repent soon afterwards."***

This is also established in the Sunna of the Prophet (peace be upon him) (Sunna is habitual practice, customary procedures or action, norm, usage sanctioned by tradition). Umar bin Al-Khattab narrated: Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) said, "The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions, and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended. So whoever

emigrates for Allah and His Messenger then his emigration will be for Allah and His Messenger. And whoever emigrates for worldly benefits or for a woman to marry her, his emigration will be for what he emigrated for."

Therefore, man's deeds (good or evil) depend upon his intentions. However, the deeds of the nonbelievers are excluded because atheists are not obligated to observe the precepts of religion. Whatever good deeds an atheist does will not be accepted from him, despite the fact that he will be punished for not doing them.

Although intention is the basis for the reward: a believer gets, his deeds should be closely guided by the Holy Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet t (peace be upon him). If he deviates from the norms stated therein, he will have committed a criminal fraud. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, ***"It is not fitting for a Believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by Allah and His Messenger, to have any option about their decision: If anyone disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he is indeed on a clearly wrong Path."***

As for the importance of following the Sunna of the Prophet (peace be upon him), Anas bin Malik narrated: Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him)

said, "He who does not follow my Sunna, is not one of my followers."

Islam has established the principle of individual responsibility: every individual is responsible for what he/she does. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, ***"Every man's fate We have fastened on his own neck: On the Day of Judgment We shall bring out for him a scroll, which he will see spread open. (It will be said to him): 'Read thine (own) record: sufficient is the soul this day to make out an account against thee'. Who receiveth it for his own benefit: Who goeth astray does so to his own loss: No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another: nor would We punish until We had sent a messenger (to give warning)."***

Islam does not approve of the idea of placing the blame or the responsibility of one's deeds on someone else's shoulders; nor does it accept that someone be punished or rewarded for what someone else does. When those who tried to deny the truth of the Qur'an put the blame on the nations before them, claiming that they had been betrayed and misled, they said, ***"Our Lord! It is these that misled us: so give them a double punishment in the Fire",*** **but their defense was not accepted, and they were told,** ***"Doubled for all: but this ye do not know."***

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3) <u>The Major Means of Forgiving Sins in Islam:</u>

It is obvious that sins, according to Islam, occur due to one's own deeds. They cannot be inherited from parents or grandparents. Falling into sins is the result of insincere intentions regarding faith, actions and words. It is also the result of not following the words of Allah and the teachings of His Messenger (peace be upon him). What are the best ways (established by Islam) of having sins forgiven?

a) Forgiving Sins through Repudiating Tainted Religions and Embracing Islam instead:

Many people have been accustomed to embracing a number of pagan religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism and Zoroastrianism. Also, a few distorted religions, which had been formally true; have always been adopted by millions of people. In these religions, polytheism replaced monotheism and numerous mythical stories were added to the original texts, turning them into a peculiar mixture. Judaism and Christianity are striking examples of such distorted religions.

If any of these religions is embraced by someone after Islam has been revealed to the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him), it will not be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter, he will be

a loser. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, ***"If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah), never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost."***

According to the various interpretations of this verse, Islam is not a sect or an ethnic religion. All Religion is one, for the Truth is one. It was the religion preached by all the earlier Prophets. So Islam was the Truth taught by all the inspired Books. In essence, it amounts to a consciousness of the Will and Plan of Allah and a joyful submission to that Will and Plan. If anyone wants a religion other than that, he is false to his own nature, as he is false to Allah's Will and Plan. Such a one cannot expect guidance, for he has deliberately renounced guidance.

Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, ***"Who can be better in religion than one who submits his whole self to Allah, does good, and follows the way of Abraham the true in faith? For Allah did take Abraham for a friend";*** and ***"Say: Shall we tell you of those who lose most in respect of their deeds? Those whose efforts have been wasted in this life, while they thought that they were acquiring good by their works?"*** Ibn Taimeyah, Islam's greatest scholar, interpreted this verse as follows: "Those who prided themselves on their works in this life,

and now find that those works are of no avail, their loss is all the greater because they had a misplaced confidence in their own deeds or in the assistance of false protectors." Allah is the only Protector: no one else's protection is of any use. Many people have such a smug sense of self-righteousness that while they go on doing wrong, they think that they are acquiring merit. The sincere are those who believe in their spiritual responsibility and act as in Allah's sight.

When Islam was revealed to Mohammed (peace be upon him), all the roads except one were blocked before truth-seekers: the road to Islam. If anyone with a religion other than Islam meets Allah, it will not be accepted. Explaining Allah's words, ***"And have chosen for you Islam as your religion "***, Imam Al-Alusi says that this verse deals with the backsliding of the Jews and Christians from their pure religions to which the coping stone was placed by Islam. As a logical corollary to the corruption of the earlier religions of Allah, Islam is now the only acceptable religion.

Allah's mercy on mankind is so great that it gives those who abandon paganism or turn away from distorted religions and willingly embrace Islam the opportunity to have all their former sins eradicated as if they were born anew. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, ***"Say to the Unbelievers, if (now)***

they desist (from Unbelief), their past would forgiven them; but if they persist, the punishment, of those before them is already (a matter warning for them)." In this verse Allah assigns Messenger (peace be upon him) to ask the Unbelievers to cease from fighting the Believe and from the persecution of truth. If they do, their past wicked deeds will be remitted; if not they will be punished for their unjust persistence.

Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, ***"Those who reject Allah and hinder (men) from the Path Allah, - their deeds will Allah bring to naught. But those who believe and work deeds of righteousness, and believe in the (Revelation) send down to Mohammed-for it is the Truth from the. Lord, - He will remove from them their ills and improve their condition. This because those who reject Allah follow falsehood. While those who believe follow the Truth from their Lord: Thus does Allah set forth for men their lessons similitudes."***

This passage means that whatever the Unbelievers do will miss its mark, because Allah is the Source of all energy and life. If the wicked try to persecute men or seduce them from the Truth, the result will be the opposite of what they intend. The word 'bal' (translated as 'condition') denotes state or condition, whether external, or of the heart and

mind. Both meanings apply here. The more the wicked rage, the better will be the position of the righteous, and Allah will make it easier and easier for the righteous to love and follow the Truth.

Allah sent down (bestowed) His mercy and forgiveness on those who believe in Him and His Messenger. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, ***"O ye that believe in His Messenger, and he will bestow on you a double portion of his mercy: He will provide for you a Light by which ye shall walk (straight in your path), and He will forgive you (your past): for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."***

The jinns (a class of spirits of earth inhabitants that assume various forms and exercise supernatural activities) are also urged to believe in Islam; and this belief is the way to the remittance of some of their sins. Allah tells us a story about the jinns. He says, ***"They said, 'O our people! We have heard a Book revealed after Moses, confirming what came before it: it guides to the Truth and to a Straight Path. O our people, hearken to the one who invites (you) to Allah, and believe in him: He will forgive you your faults, and deliver you from a Chastisement Grievous."*** In these verses, 'the one who invites to Allah' refers to the Holy Prophet. So if the jinns believe in Allah and His Prophet, Allah will forgive them their sins on their repentance and

amendment of their lives, and save them the Penalty of the future life.

The people of the Book (the adherents of Judaism and Christianity) have always been commanded to follow the Path of Mohammed (peace be upon him) as a provision for accepting their deeds, and for forgiving them their faults and sins. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, ***"If only the people of the Book had believed and been righteous, We should indeed have blotted out their iniquities and admitted them to the Gardens of Bliss. If only they had stood fast by the Torah, the Gospel, and all the revelation that was sent to them from their Lord, they would have eaten both from above them and from below their feet."*** The reference is to the Jews and the Christians, and to the general enjoyment (physical, social, mental, moral and spiritual) they would experience if they truly believed in Allah and His Messenger, and stopped taking unlawful profit, from usury or trust funds or other ways.

b) Forgiving Sins through Avoiding Forbidden Things, especially Grave Sins:

A number of forbidden things are clearly stated in the Holy Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet (peace be upon him). For example, meat of an animal that is found dead before being

slaughtered, meat of an animal not slaughtered in accordance with ritual requirements (on which the name of other than Allah has been invoked), meat of swine and blood are forbidden; and those who avoid them are promised forgiveness. After a number of forbidden things has been mentioned in the Fifth Chapter of the Qur'an (Surat Al-Ma'ida), warning is given to those who do not yield to Allah's orders:
"If anyone rejects faith, fruitless is his work, and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost (all spiritual good)." The word faith here has special meaning which encompasses acts of worship such as lawful food, cleanliness, social intercourse, marriage and other interests in life which are linked with our duty to Allah and faith in Him.

As for the Muslim, who resists his own sensuous desires and lusts, and his own inclination towards worldly pleasures which often lead to committing sins, great rewards and forgiveness are awaiting him. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, ***"Allah doeth wish to make clear to you and to guide you into the ways of those before you: and (He doeth wish to) turn to you (in Mercy): and Allah is All-knowing, All-wise Allah doeth wish to turn to you, but the wish of those who follow their lusts is that ye should turn away (from Him), Far, far away." And "If ye (but) eschew the most heinous of all things which ye are forbidden to do,***

We shall remit your evil deeds, and admit you to a Gate of great honor. "

The most heinous of all things (grave sins) are determined and defined in number of the Prophet's sayings.

Imam Ibn Kathir compiled the sayings of the Companions of the Prophet Mohammed concerning the great destructive sins. He then defined a great destructive sin as the sin whose punishment is Hell in the Hereafter, and which deserves legal punishment in worldly life. Hence, a great destructive sin is one which is clearly forbidden by a statement in the Holy Qur'an or in the Sunna of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

And there is no doubt that atheism and polytheism are the most destructive of all sins. These cannot be remitted or forgiven. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, ***"Allah forgiveth not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgiveth anything else, to whom He pleaseth."*** Explaining why this verse was revealed to the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him), Imam Al-Alusi said: When Allah's words, ***"O my servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah: for Allah forgives all sins"*** were revealed to the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him), he went out to recite them before his

followers. One of them stood up and asked, "What about those who set up partners with Allah?" Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) gave him no answer. The man repeated his question, and the Prophet Mohammed still kept silent. Then the verse beginning with ***"Allah forgiveth not that partners....."*** was revealed to exclude atheists and polytheists from those whose sins can be forgiven. However, the majority of Muslim scholars say that forgiveness may extend to all sins (with no exception) if repentance occurs. Yet, joining others in worship with Allah is a great sin. Abdullah bin Mas'ud narrated: When the following verse was revealed: ***"It is those who believe (in the Oneness of Allah and worship none but Him Alone) and confuse not their belief with Zulm (wrong .i.e. by worshipping others beside Allah.)",*** the companions of Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) asked, "Who is amongst us who had not done Zulm?" Then Allah revealed: ***"Verily, joining others in worship with Allah is indeed a great Zulm."***

c) Forgiving Sins through Observing Religious Duties, Following the Sunna of the Prophet, and Performing Desirable Acts (those acts whose neglect is not punished by Allah, but whose performance is rewarded):

Allah has decreed some religious duties which are classified into articles of faith, observances and mutual relations. Performing these duties is greatly rewarded especially such observances as prayer, fasting, alms-giving and pilgrimage which are regarded as atonement for a Muslim's sins. Abu Huraira narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "The prayer offered in congregation is seventy-five times more superior (in reward) to the prayer offered alone in one's house or in a business center, because if one performs ablution and does it perfectly, and then proceeds to the mosque with the sole intention of offering prayer, then for each step which he takes towards the mosque, Allah upgrades him a degree in reward and (forgives) crosses out one of his sins (at each step) till he enters the mosque. He is considered in (prayer) as long as he is waiting for the prayer, and the angels keep on asking for Allah's forgiveness for him, and they keep on saying: "O Allah! Forgive him, as long as he keeps on sitting at his praying place and does not pass wind." Also Abu Huraira narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Whoever fasts during the

month of Ramadan out of sincere faith, and hoping to attain Allah's Rewards, then all his past sins will be forgiven." Abu Huraira narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "(The performance of) Umra is an expiation for the sins committed between it and the previous one. And the reward of Hajj (the one accepted by Allah) is nothing but Paradise."

Following the Sunna of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and performing desirable acts are one way of atoning for sins. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, ***"... for those things that are good remove those that are evil ..."***

Having patience (forbearing) with afflictions and misfortunes, such as illness, poverty, etc., is also rewarded. Abu Said Al-Khudri and Abu Huraira narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "No fatigue, no disease, nor sorrow, nor sadness, nor hurt, nor distress befalls a Muslim, even if it were the prick he receives from a thorn, but Allah expiates some of his sins for that." And Abdullah narrated that I visited the Prophet (peace be upon him) during his ailments and he was suffering from high fever. I said, "You have a high fever. Is it because you will have a double reward for it?" He said, "Yes, for no Muslim is afflicted with any harm but for that Allah will remove his sins as the leaves of a tree fall down." Abu Huraira also narrated: The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "If Allah wants to do good to somebody, He afflicts him with trials."

d) Forgiving Sins through Turning to Allah in Repentance and Seeking His Pardon:

Allah is Much-Forgiving; He is the only One entitled to accepting repentance and to forgiving

sins. He says in the Holy Qur'an, ***"O ye who believe! Turn to Allah with sincere repentance: in the hope that your Lord will remove from you your evil deeds, and admit you to Gardens beneath which Rivers flow."***

And He says, ***"Know they not that Allah doeth accept repentance from His votaries?"*** Abu Huraira narrated that I heard Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) saying, "By Allah! I seek Allah's Forgiveness and turn to Him in repentance for more than seventy times a day."

The heart of man, as created by Allah, is pure and unsullied. Every time that a man does an ill deed, it marks a stain or rust on his heart. But on repentance and forgiveness, such stain is washed off. If there is no repentance and forgiveness, the stains deepen and spread more and more, until the heart is sealed, and eventually the man dies a spiritual death.

Due to human weaknesses, Allah urges all Muslims to seek His forgiveness and to turn to Him in repentance. He says in the Holy Qur'an, ***"And seek ye the Grace of Allah: for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." And He says, "If anyone does evil, or wrongs his own soul but afterwards seeks Allah's forgiveness, he will find Allah Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."***

The Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) used to urge his companions to seek Allah's repentance, telling them how to do it. Shaddad bin Aus narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "The most superior way of asking for forgiveness from Allah is: 'O Allah, You are my Lord! None has the right to be worshipped but you. You created me and I am Your slave, and I am faithful to my covenant and, my promise (to you) as much as I can. I seek refuge with You from all the evil I have done. I acknowledge before you all the blessings You have bestowed upon me, and I confess to You all my sins. So I entreat You to forgive sins, for nobody can forgive sins except You."

When sins concern one's obligations and duties towards Allah are committed, repentance can only be accepted of those who meet the following provisions: feeling regretful, refraining from committing more sins, and having firm resolution not to commit such sins again. And when sins are related to one's transgression upon somebody else's right, the transgressor will have to repair what he has imparted, and compensate affected person for the damage done until, by fair means, both sides reach a mutual consent.

e) Forgiving Sins through Supplication and Invocation of Allah:

As this life is not the end of all things, and we are to have its fulfillment in the Hereafter, we have only to pray to the Lord of the Present and the Hereafter, and He will hear us, forgive us, guide us, and make our path smooth. But pride will have its fall, and its humiliating Punishment. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, ***"And your Lord says: Call on Me; I will answer your (prayer): but those who are too arrogant to serve Me will surely enter Hell Abased."*** He also says, ***"When My servants ask thee concerning Me, I am indeed close (to them): I respond to the prayer of every suppliant when he calleth on Me."***

The Prophet (peace be upon him) used to urge the Muslims to call on Allah and pray to Him. A great many Hadiths [Prophetic traditions or narratives relating deeds and utterances of the Prophet (peace be upon him)] support this idea Supplication cannot be sincere unless Allah is always remembered. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, ***"Then do ye remember Me; I will remember you. "***, and ***"For men and women who engage much in Allah's remembrance, Allah has prepared forgiveness and great reward."*** Invocation of Allah purifies the heart and protects it from worldly temptations which can drive a seduced person into

perilous situations. Invocation of Allah crosses out sins and upgrades a suppliant's rank in the Hereafter. Abu Huraira narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Whoever says, 'Subhan Allahi Wa bihamdihi' one hundred times a day, will be forgiven all his sins even if they were as much as the foam of the sea." 'Subhan Allahi wa bihamdihi' means 'I deem Allah free of any resemblance to anything whatever in any respect, and I glorify His praises.'

Since one's invocation must be accepted by Allah, a Muslim has to show patience, has to appeal to Allah with determination, and he should not lose hope if the response to his invocation is delayed. Abu Huraira narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "None of you should say: 'O Allah! Forgive me if You wish; O Allah, be Merciful to me if You wish, but he should always appeal to Allah with determination, for nobody can force Allah to do something against His Will"; and he (peace be upon him) said, "The invocation of anyone of you is granted (by Allah) if he does not show impatience (by saying, I invoked Allah but my request has not been granted')". A Muslim will have to refrain from earning his living dishonestly, for Allah does not accept the invocation of those who encroach upon others' rights. Abu Huraira narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "If one gives in charity what equals one date-fruit from the honestly earned

money-and Allah accepts only the honestly earned money-Allah takes it in His Right (hand) and then enlarges its reward for that person (who has given it), as anyone of you brings up his baby horse, so much so that it becomes as big as a mountain."

In concluding this book we can say that the Islamic concept of sin and its means of forgiveness, if compared to that of Christianity, are very simple. It is quite easy to comprehend and practice. This is far away from the mysterious rituals of Christianity which are meant to wipe out sins like the belief in the idea of Crucifixion, Monasticism, Baptism, Confession before Priest, Eucharist and Transubstantiation.

According to Islam, Adam and his wife Eve had committed a sin by eating from the forbidden tree. But they have repented and asked forgiveness from Allah who accepted their repentance. Hence, there was no need to assume that the original sin committed by them was inherited by their innocent children.

According to Islam committing a sin or going stray is an individual choice. Seeking forgiveness is an individual responsibility. There are so many ways, a Muslim can attain forgiveness from Allah for his sins. These include repudiating corrupt religions and embracing Islam instead, abstaining

from forbidden things especially grave sins, observing religious duties, following the sunna of the Prophet (peace be upon him), performing desirable acts, turning to Allah in repentance and seeking his pardon, reciting the Holy Qur'an, supplication and invocation of Allah at all times.

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